

11/17/68

Mr. Bill Bentley  
Office of the D.A.  
New Orleans, La.

Dear Bill,

It was after midnight that I got home, after a taxing, four-week trip, exhausted, ill, and facing an enormous accumulation of mail. Before me I have the notes of this trip, in itself an enormous task, in the context of the other work I must do. That includes the reading to two completed manuscripts preparatory to final typing.

From this, I hope you will understand that in writing you before I do anything else, I attribute considerable significance to it.

We never did have a chance to get together, alone, during my recent visits to New Orleans. You indicated the desire, as I did. I held myself available every night I was there and each day I was in the office in the afternoon I waited until after it closed. Each day I was there lunch time I held that open, too.

As a consequence, there are many things we did not get a chance to discuss. This lack of internal communication has become a great problem and may be one of the greatest hazards we face. You saw one dramatic and costly, albeit harmless example in the case of the literature-distribution footage. It is not the only one. Others may not be harmless. There are other areas in which I have been working in which you also are. In some I have been able to tap dependable sources not accessible to you.

Now that you know I have been to Dallas, even if you knew only some of those I have seen, you should be able to guess one of these subjects. It is one on which I understand you have been pushing hard and have Jim's ear and interest. On it I expect assistance from two of the highly-placed people with whom I had long meetings. There we now need have questions, soon we should be in a position where the answers are definitive.

The invitation I accepted was of long standing. I delayed accepting it until I had reason to believe conditions would be most propitious. With some of those with whom I met (and this, as you realize, I did not have time to go into when we all met with Jim and he pooped out from illness) I had earlier been in fruitful correspondence. I waited until I would not be going hot in hand, for this is not the best way to ask help. Those of whom I asked it I first obligated to me. Then I sought their aid. I expect it, as I expect it to be dependable. The information I look forward to receiving should be the best possible in the areas in which I ask it.

As you also may have observed, I spend as little time in the office as I can when I am in New Orleans, for people will talk to me when they will not to officials, and there are still too many people to be talked to. In this area also my recent work has been fruitful. God knows when I'll be able to type memos on these interviews. However, by this unsafe medium, I still tell you that I have tapped several sources on the other side, those friendly with or associated with defendants and unfriendly witnesses.

Heretofore also I look forward to fruitful results in areas of your interest and activity, as I glean it from comment in the office, the only source I had - and it an accidental one.

Unless I seriously misread what I have seen, in two areas in which I have long had interest and long been seeking fact, I believe you are in error, possibly booby-trapped. In both I believe you have Jim's ear and that he is acting on this. In both, I have reason to believe disaster impends. You should have little difficulty anticipating at least one of these. I ask you to consider the awesome potential of his acting on what you have presented to him and being wrong.

It will be ruinous to him, to you personally, particularly because of your background, and to all of us.

Because there is no immediate need for haste, I strongly encourage you to slow him down, to prevent precipitous action, until my own work is completed. I cannot say how long this will require. It may be only a few days, which is my hope. At worst it should not be more than a few weeks. This is still but a short wait, particularly when you consider the possible consequences of not waiting. I regard this as of sufficient importance to have gone to the trouble of establishing two entirely new means of getting the information down there when I get it.

Of all the people working with Jim, you alone, in the past, have discussed with me the workings of the department of disinformation. You understand it. Therefore it would be even more tragic were you to become one of its victims, or were Jim and all of us through you.

In your case, the consequences will be worse because you will immediately be accused of acting for your former connections. If everything we have all worked so hard for is torpedoed, regardless of purity of intent, and you are a means, who will believe anything else?

Therefore, I urge you to see to it that there is no hasty action until I get the answers I expect. After knowing Jim for a year and a half I am certain he is on the verge of doing something. I believe you have led him there and am certain you must lead him back before it is too late.

Six weeks to two months ago I had made tentative arrangements to be in New Orleans for two weeks beginning December 1. That is now but two weeks away. If I have not received the answers I expect by then, I will then be but an hour and a half away from them and can go for them, in person, rather than having just asked for them. If I by then do not have the answers, I will go, thus Jim, you and all of us will have had protection - and at no real cost.

I cannot communicate this to Jim without undercutting you, so I have not. I realize this places a greater burden on you, but that seems to be a less undesirable alternative. However, I have no objection at all to your discussing this with him.

When you know I have not yet had time to unpack, you know the significance I attach to this letter. I send it certified to assure its delivery. As soon as I have answers, you will have them.

Sincerely,